

Message Text

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POUCHED AS INFO TO ALL CONSULATES IN CANADA

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FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY DEPT OF
INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS ON APR 15 CONCERNING
CABINET DECISION TO PERMIT BEAUFORT SEA DRILLING THIS
SUMMER:

BEGIN TEXT -

CABINET TODAY DECIDED TO AUTHORIZE OPEN WATER DRILLING
IN THE BEAUFORT SEA BY DOME PETROLEUM, WITH SPECIAL SAFETY
PRECAUTIONS BEING IMPOSED FOR THE SUMMER OF 1976.

IN ANNOUNCING THE DECISION, NORTHERN AFFAIRS MINISTER
JUDD BUCHANAN SAID THAT THE SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS IN 1976
WERE TO REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS TO AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM
DURING THE PERIOD WHEN THE DRILLING SYSTEM AND CONTINGENCY
PLANS WERE BEING TESTED IN THE BEAUFORT SEA ENVIRONMENT.

ON SEPT 15, 1976 DRILLING WILL BE STOPPED AND AN
ASSESSMENT MADE OF METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS. IF THE
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OUTLOOK IS FAVOURABLE, A 10 DAY EXTENSION MAY BE AU-
THORIZED. THE PURPOSE OF THIS LIMITATION IS TO ALLOW

A PERIOD OF A MONTH OR MORE IN WHICH A RELIEF-WELL
COULD BE DRILLED IN THE EVENT OF A BLOW-OUT LATE IN
THE OPERATING SEASON.

IN ADDITIONAL, A PROGRAM FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE TESTING
OF ALL ELEMENTS OF DOME'S SYSTEM THAN WAS ORIGINALLY CONTEM-
PLATED WILL BE DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED.

"THE DECISION HAS BEEN A DIFFICULT ONE FOR THE
GOVERNMENT TO TAKE," MR. BUCHANAN SAID. "THERE ARE A
NUMBER OF CONCERNS AND RISKS THAT HAD TO BE CONSIDERED.

"THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO WEIGH PRESSING NATIONAL ENERGY
REQUIREMENTS, THE POTENTIALLY RICH OIL AND GAS RESOURCES
UNDERLYING THE BEAUFORT SEA, AND THE SUBSTANTIAL
FINANCIAL COMMITMENT MADE BY DOME PETROLUEM, AGAINST THE
ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS AND THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY NATIVE
GROUPS AND THE UNITED STATES.

"THE GOVERNMENT CONCLUDED THAT THE RISKS ARE LOW
ENOUGH TO BE ACCEPTABLE AND, BALANCED WITH THE NEED TO
CONFIRM CANADA'S ENERGY RESOURCES, JUSTIFYING PROCEEDING
WITH DRILLING THIS YEAR."

MR. BUCHANAN NOTED THAT OUT OF A TOTAL OF OVER 20,000
OFFSHORE WELLS DRILLED DURING THE PAST 20 YEARS LESS THAN
1/5 OF 1 PERCENT RESULTED IN BLOWOUTS. OF THESE, ONLY
FOUR WELLS RESULTED IN OIL SPILLS. THIS SUGGESTS THAT
RISK OF EXTENSIVE POLLUTION FROM OFFSHORE DRILLING
ARE FAR LESS THAN FROM NORMAL TANKER TRAFFIC.

THE DRILLING TECHNOLOGY TO BE APPLIED IS RECOGNIZED
TO BE THE FINEST IN THE WORLD TODAY.

IN ADDITION, UNPRECEDENTED ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS
WERE BEING IMPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT. THESE CONDITIONS,
WHICH WILL APPLY IN 1976 AND FUTURE YEARS, INCLUDE:

- TWO DRILLSHIPS OPERATING SIMULTANEOUSLY,
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PROVIDING BACK-UP CAPABILITY ONE FOR THE OTHER

- CONTINUOUS MONITORING OF OPERATIONS BY SHIP-BASED
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INSPECTORS POSSESSING PERTINENT
TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE AND AUTHORITY TO SHUT DOWN
OPERATIONS

- BLOWOUT PREVENTERS INSTALLED AT THE SEA FLOOR,
WITH SPECIAL PROTECTION TO PRECLUDE DAMAGE FROM
ICE KEELS

- CEMENTED STEEL CASING INSTALLED SEQUENTIALLY AT FREQUENT INTERVALS TO PROTECT THE DRILL HOLES

- THE MOST SOPHISTICATED AND RELIABLE MONITORING DEVICES TO MEASURE PRESENCE OF HYDROCARBONS IN GEOLOGICAL FORMATIONS AND TO PREDICT SUBSURFACE PRESSURES

- ICE TRACKING SYSTEMS TO MONITOR THE MOVEMENT OF ICE FLOES LARGE ENOUGH TO INTERRUPT DRILLING PROCEDURES

- ICE-BREAKER WORKBOTAS TO DIVERT SMALLER ICE FLOES FROM CONTACTING THE DRILLING VESSELS

- A QUICK-DISCONNECT SYSTEM FOR THE ANCHORS TO FACILITATE PROMPT AND SAFE ABANDONMENT OF A DRILLING LOCATION TO AVOID LARGE ICE FLOES.

IN ADDITION THERE IS A REQUIREMENT THAT THE DRILLING COMPANY, DOME PETROLUEM, CARRY LIABILITY INSURE OF DOLS 50 MILLION FOR THE DRILLING PROGRAM AS EVIDENCE OF FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY UNDER THE ARCTIC WATERS POLLUTION PREVENTION ACT. THIS LIABILITY WILL EXTEND TO U.S. PROPERTY AND CITIZENS IN ALASKA.

THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT WILL STAND READY IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF AN OIL SPILL TO ASSIST INUIT COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS IN RECOVERING RESULTANT DAMAGES.

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WHILE THE GREATEST EFFORTS WILL BE MADE TO AVOID AN OIL SPILL, SPECIAL CLEAN-UP MEASURES HAVE ALSO BEEN PREPARED. THE BEST AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY IN OIL SPILL COUNTERMEASURES WILL BE REQUIRED OF DOME.

A GOVERNMENT BACK-UP CONTINGENCY PLAN WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN WHICH RESOURCES CAN BE BROUGHT TO BEAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, THE DEPARTMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT, NATIONAL DEFENCE AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORY.

A FURTHER JOINT CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR THE BEAUFORT SEA IS BEING NEGOTIATED WITH THE UNITED STATES.
END TEXT. ENDERS

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